

Mali leaves a treasure of memories

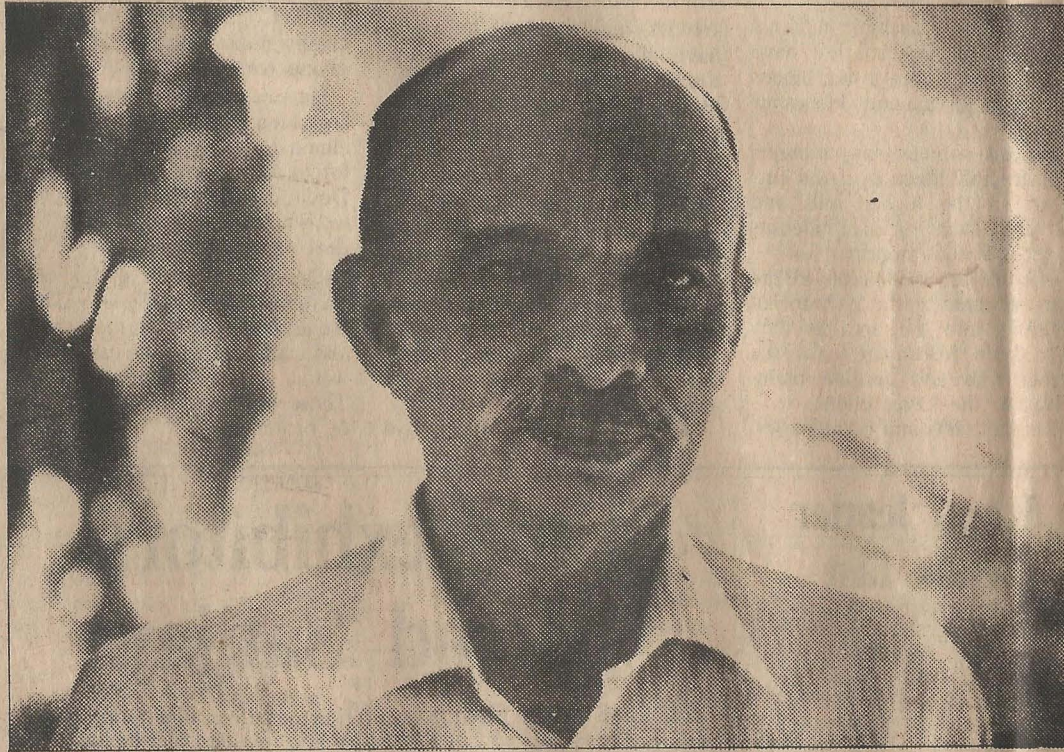
By Konniyoor R Narendranath

IN the sad demise of V Madhavan Nair, known to many as just Mali, Kerala has lost not only a writer of ability but also an exemplary person of character, a perfect gentleman. He served in several jobs with devotion – as an advocate, journalist, editor in National Book Trust, senior officer in AIR etc.

Born on December 6, 1915 at Thiruvananthapuram, Madhavan Nair inherited a rich tradition of learning and writing skill. His father, Sadasyathilakan T.K. Velu Pillai, was a noted author of the older generation and is remembered most as the architect of Travancore State Manual. In his youth Nair was a star tennis player and had won several prestigious matches.

Indeed, writing was always dear to his heart. He began seriously with the publication of tales from Greek classics (*Ithihasa Manjari*) and stories of criminal trials (*Kutta Visthara Kathakal*). He had an inborn talent in music, which he used to say, was inherited from his mother. He nourished this into a passion with his intense determination. Some evident results of this passion can be seen in his later works, *Kerala Sangeetham* and *Karna Sapadham* kathakali. Though Madhavan Nair changed his profession several times, he never gave up his abiding commitment to music and literature.

Though I had known his younger brother, the late V P Nair, a former Member of Parliament, very much earlier, I met Madhavan Nair for the first time in 1952, when I joined the Broadcasting Station at Thiruvananthapuram on transfer from AIR, Kozhikode. This was the period of metamorphosis,



when the Travancore Broadcasting station was in the process of turning into AIR.

Madhavan Nair was the leading figure in the group, of which I was one, entrusted with the responsibility of planning and implementing the basic pattern of programmes, on the lines followed in other AIR centres.

Malayalam broadcasting, which began in 1939 in Madras and later in 1943 in Thiruvananthapuram, was still in its infancy. We had to do much to establish a firm foundation on which its structure was to be built. The expectations and the thrill, about broadcasting in general, among the people, was intense and immense. Our effort was to satisfy at least a section of

the people with a variety of items.

But the task was not an easy one. There was a serious dearth of proper material and trained personnel suited to the new medium. Musicians were in most cases unfamiliar with Malayalam classical compositions. Most of them considered it 'infra dig' to sing them! In spite of serious objections and even protests from several artistes, we insisted that they should sing at least one or two Malayalam compositions during their broadcast recitals! But the problem was to get classical compositions for use.

For obtaining sources and discovering old compositions in Malayalam, we approached several scholars and authors

interested in classical music. I recollect the times, when with the deep commitment inculcated in us by the leader Madhavan Nair, we went in search of Malayalam classical compositions in several *grandhappuras* of many reputed *tharavads*! On several occasions we coaxed grandmas to recite from memory some classical pieces for which no script was available. We noted them down for appropriate use.

With these efforts we were able to discover a number of old classical pieces by K. C. Kesava Pillai, Irayimman Thampi, Kuttikunji Thankachi, Kuttamathu, Chattampi Swamikal and a few others. But their notations or traditional

method of singing, were not available. The only solution was to set to music these scripts based on the ragas noted by the composers. These compositions with notations were used intensively for music lessons, broadcast by the stations. It was in this manner that most of the present popular Malayalam classical compositions were made familiar to people and musicians.

The contributions of Madhavan Nair to enrich Malayalam literature meant for children and youngsters is well known. Hence I won't repeat them here. But I must say that he is one of the pioneers who retold tales of Indian classics to our kids. He himself rendered into English some of his original stories such as *Circus* and *Janthusthan* for wider readership. He had always shown that writing for children is not child's play and children's stories should not be childish creations.

Mention has to be made here of the efforts of Madhavan Nair in making acceptable radio plays as a separate branch of our literature. In the early years of broadcasting he wrote and produced a number of effective and impressive radio dramas, based on Indian classics. I am sure there are still some people left, who had personally experienced the thrill of listening to some of them. In fact the radio plays of Madhavan Nair can easily be accepted as model plays by aspiring writers of radio dramas.

Many are his admirers and friends, who may miss his imposing presence and delightful conversation, enriched with innumerable anecdotes on men and matters. May his soul rest in peace!